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TAGS: PREL PTER UNSC SY IS LE  
SUBJECT: LEBANON: SYG BRIEFS ON VISIT TO BEIRUT

Classified By: Ambassador Zalmay M. Khalilzad, per 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) During a meeting with Amb Khalilzad on November 19 (other issues covered septel), SYG Ban Ki-Moon said that he had emphasized during his November 15-16 visit to Beirut that Lebanon must hold presidential elections on time to elect a candidate "broadly acceptable" to all Lebanese. Ban said he pressed these points with all of his interlocutors, who included Prime Minister Fuad Siniora, Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri, Parliamentary Majority leader Sa'ad Hariri, and Maronite Patriarch Sfeir. Although he acknowledged that he had not gone as far as the U.S. in describing the potential for an election by simple majority, Ban argued that he had shifted the terms of the debate away from demands by Syria and Hizballah for a "consensus" president. In this regard, noting that France has been very active in working with the Maronite Patriarch to propose a list of compromise presidential candidates, Ban said that UNSCR 1559 Special Envoy Larsen had stayed in close touch with the French Ambassador in Beirut during the SYG's visit. Although Berri denied having the Patriarch's list, the SYG said he knows that both Berri and Hariri received the list.

¶2. (C) Ban said that Hariri expressed a preference for a candidate who would be independent of Syria but acknowledged that such a candidate could not come from within the March 14 ranks. According to Ban, Hariri told Larsen that he (Hariri) could live with a candidate acceptable to Syria and Hizballah as long as the Lebanese opposition supported his bid to become Prime Minister. Ban said he had also spoken by phone to Christian leader Michel Aoun, who promised to "show flexibility" during the presidential election process. Lastly, Ban reported that he had telephoned Syrian President Asad to urge him to play a positive role in the Lebanese elections. Asad, however, reportedly told the SYG that he had "no influence" over Lebanon's Christians and could therefore not ensure that they are able to agree on a compromise presidential candidate.  
Khalilzad